

Utility plans wind farm for Northern Nevada area

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A 200-megawatt, \$400 million wind farm that would span the Idaho-Nevada border near Jackpot was announced Thursday by Sierra Pacific Resources.

It is the first major wind power project for the utility, which is the parent of Nevada Power Co. The utility said it is discussing a partnership with the RES Group of Cos., which is part of the Sir Robert McAlpine Group of the United Kingdom.

The project would produce enough power to serve 65,000 homes.

Sierra hopes to start generating electricity from the China Mountain Wind Energy Project by 2011, assuming it gets all the necessary regulatory approvals from state and federal agencies. The power would be shipped to Nevada Power Co. using a transmission line proposed as part of the \$3.8 billion Ely Energy Center, a coal-fired power plant under development in eastern Nevada.

"It's one of the best sites we've seen," said Tom Fair, Sierra's executive for renewable energy programs.

The 9,000-acre site is near a ridge but in a flat area, making it relatively easy to construct wind turbines that may reach more than 400 feet high.

The Air Force has not objected to the project, Fair said. The developers will be conducting an environmental assessment on whether the turbines pose a significant hazard to birds and bats. The developers would need approval from the Bureau of Land Management to build the project, which would be located primarily on U.S. land.

Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., who favors renewable energy and opposes coal-fired power plants, has criticized the utilities for not building a wind farm.

Fair said the company has been active in reviewing wind power sites, including one near Searchlight. The utility contracted with wind power developers in the past but those projects failed. "The developers pulled the plug on them," Fair said.

Tim Carlson, former president of the Nevada Test Site Development Corp., tried to develop a \$130 million wind farm on the test site but Nellis Air Force Base objected in 2002 because of concerns it would interfere with radar for training flights and the project was shelved.

Utility executives started talks with RES 18 months ago about the Jackpot site. RES has been monitoring wind conditions there for three years.

Wind power generally is less expensive than solar power, but wind resources in Nevada are not as attractive as they are in the Great Plains states and in West Texas.

Wind power in Nevada typically would cost 7 to 11 cents per kilowatt hour, Fair said. By comparison, pulverized coal costs 6 to 6.5 cents per kilowatt hour. Power from natural gas plants costs 6.5 to 7.5 cents per kilowatt hour.

The Jackpot project probably will cost \$1,900 to \$2,100 per kilowatt, Fair said.

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